The Steadily Change
Shrunkhal Khemraj

परिस पब्लिकेशन

निर्मिती । वितरण। प्रकाशन

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The Steadily Change (Poem) by Shrunkhal Khemraj

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A poet of knotty questions and tender emotions

It was about two years back that, Adivasi poet Usha Atram, who has a markedly deep understanding of Indian culture, introduced me to the poems of Shrunkhal Khemraj at that time, Shrunkhal was a student of class 4 and was all of 9 years. Usha ji had told me that Shrunkhal not only writes poetry but the manuscript of his anthology of poems is ready and his parents want to get it published. Usha ji wanted me to write the foreword to the anthology. At that time, the Covid-19 pandemic and the accompanying bombardment of information was yet to overwhelm The world. I agreed. But then the pandemic struck and led to such unprecedented mayhem in society that one virtually stopped writing or reading about anything other than Covid and its ramifications.

In the interregnum, I received numerous phone calls and emails from Shrunkhal's parents reminding me of my promise. They also kept on sending new poems penned by him. Going through the new poems was a mind-blowing experience. Not only did Shrunkhal continue to write amid the tumult all around but he increasingly tackled more complex issues and

topics. Even during the pandemic, his poetry was not confined to Covid; but was blessed with myriad colors of life. He seemed to be viewing life in its entirety lacking neither in immediacy nor a far reaching vision and an acknowledgment of the immensity of the working of the universe.

This anthology contains only some selected poems of Shrunkhal Khemraj. How he picks an issue and how he tries to deal with it in its fullness is apparent from his poem titled 'Money'.

Money is like a thief
All money destroys people
World is now fond of money

He is sad that human sensitivities are becoming money-centric but is well aware of the importance of money. He also underlines what is most valuable is life. He goes on:

Money is also a good thing
Use money for good things
Life is more than money.
In the sky"

The poems he wrote during the Covid times allude to philosophical questions related to life and death, which were troubling his mind. The titles of some of his poems written in that period are 'The brief of death', 'Shut the door of life' and 'The myth of life'.

He is a child-poet of an era of transition

from post-modernism to post-humanism, and he is worried about all the things which are vanishing as a result. The vanishing things have made his dreams nightmarish. His poem titled 'Dream' talks about robots thus:

'It was dream of Robot.
It was very dangerous
There were many robots'

One of his poems is titled 'Pen tip'. In this poem, Shrunkhal tells us that he has bought a pen. He loves its golden tip. One day, he discovers that he has lost the tip. He wants to write with the pen but it is useless without the tip. He goes to a shop and buys a new pen. And herein lays the main theme of the poem. Suddenly, he starts wondering why he bought a new pen. He only needed a tip, which was available in the shop.

He goes back to the shop only to find that the tip has been sold. And a deep sense of self-guilt envelopes the poet.

This is a poetic critique of consumerism. The homes of middle-class families are becoming hoards of unneeded things and their real wishes and happiness have got buried under them. Without saying it in so many words, Shrunkhal's poem is pointing at this irony.

Shrunkhal was born into a Buddhist family. Converts to Buddhism from a Dalit background, his family believes in and upholds

progressive and pro-people values. His father

Khemraj Bhoyar is a literature-lover, who has written poems, stories and plays. His mother, Shubhangi, is a PhD in Educational Psychology and has been writing articles on various topics. His family has inherited the philosophy of Lokayat, Buddha and Kabir and they resonate in the subjects picked by Shrunkhal for penning his poems.

Shrunkhal's mother tongue is Marathi but he has chosen English as a carrier of his thoughts. There are some issues with language and an uncultivated simplicity marks his poems. This is natural and expected given that the poet is a child. But the emotions he expresses, the dreams he weaves and the social and philosophical issues he flags are not at all child-like. The poems may be somewhat raw and lacking in ssophistication but the tenderness, originality and the purity of his expressions is often missing from the works of even senior poets. Someday Shrunkhal Khemraj Bhoyar will also join the ranks of the seniors. I can only hope that even then he would retain this purity of thought and the tenderness of expression. I wish him all the best.

-Pramod Ranjan